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BUSINESS CHINESE THROUGH THE WORLD WIDE WEB

INTRODUCTION

Before the Internet became widely accessible, distance learning offered by higher education institutions included mail correspondence, audiotapes, videotapes, TV programs, and the like. These media are mainly non-interactive, i.e., students do not get immediate feedback on how they are doing. This problem was solved by the advent of computer-assisted language teaching and learning programs (Brierley and Kemble, 1991; Dunkel, 1991; Levy, 1997; Roblyer et al., 1997). With regard to learning Business Chinese, Hong (1997) concludes that second-year learners can effectively increase their reading proficiency through multimedia computer-assisted reading. In recent years, the World Wide Web (which we have come to refer to as simply the web) has emerged as a widely recognized medium of distance learning. It has been used to deliver online instruction, thereby replacing much in-class time. Harland (1991) claims that hypermedia systems like the web are productive, flexible, updatable, and economical. Maddux (1997) notes that the web, having successfully competed with television, "is a powerful testimonial to its allure, and a clue to its potential as a classroom teaching and learning tool." The popularity of the web gave rise to a number of virtual universities that exclusively offer online courses. Today, such virtual universities include Western Governor's University, Phoenix University Online, and Walden University (Hazari, 1998). Their purpose is to attract students who may otherwise be unable to attend class on campus. Such students are primarily nontraditional ones who hold regular jobs or are confined to their homes for various reasons.

WEBCT

With the rising popularity of online courses through the web, various interactive web course development tools have emerged to help non-technical users customize their own courses. Current tools available include the following: BlackBoard CourseInfo, Course-in-a-box, Lotus LearningSpace, TopClass, WebMentor, and WebCT (Hazari, 1998). Among them, WebCT (i.e., World Wide Web Course Tools) is designed by the University of British Columbia, Canada. This package of course tools is free to the public unless courses developed by it are actually offered. To date, WebCT has been licensed to various higher education institutions such as Columbia University, UCLA, the University of Georgia, the University of Colorado, and several campuses of the California State University (WebCT, 1998).

This paper presents the use of WebCT at California State University, Los Angeles (CSULA). Specifically, it discusses the use of WebCT in developing a Web Course in Business Chinese. We will not evaluate WebCT in general, but simply describe how it is applied to meet the needs of this specific course, which includes features such as course homepage, bulletin board, student data management, and online questions and answers.

WEB COURSES AT CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, LOS ANGELES

At CSULA, nontraditional students make up a large portion of the student population. They are generally older, part-time students who hold full-time jobs during the day and attend late afternoon or evening classes after work. Many of them are business professionals who have expressed an urgent need for proficiency in Business Chinese or Chinese for Specific Purposes in order to expand their employment opportunities or advance in their career. Currently, Business Chinese is offered through the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures. Although this course is taught in the late afternoon, many potential students still find it difficult to take time from their work to attend the class. Therefore, a Web Course in Business Chinese responds to such a need.

As mentioned previously, CSULA has adopted WebCT to develop online courses as part of the university's distance education program. Since the first web courses were offered in the fall quarter of 1997, over one hundred courses have been developed, or are under development. They include courses offered by the Departments of Music, Technology,

Anthropology, and Physics (CSULA, 1998). The following section describes the development of a Web Course in Business Chinese offered by the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures.

DEVELOPMENT OF WEB COURSE IN BUSINESS CHINESE

The development of the Web Course in Business Chinese was made possible through a CSULA Innovative Instruction Award. The author was given release time to attend various WebCT workshops sponsored by CSULA's Faculty Instructional Technology Support Center (FITSC, 1998). With a target date of fall 1999 for offering this course, it is for students who have taken at least two years of Chinese language. They learn the Chinese language used in business situations such as quoting prices, negotiating contracts, packaging and shipping, methods of payment, and insurance. The textbook for this course is *Practical Business Conversations* (NTNU, 1990), which presents twenty lessons of dialogs, each followed by vocabulary, substitution drills, and questions about the lesson. Cultural contexts are incorporated into the dialogs to help students understand the sociolinguistic practices of business dealings. The proficiency level is suitable for third-year students. Registered students will be given login IDs and passwords to access the course. If necessary, students who do not have the basic skill of browsing the web will be trained to do so.

The best browser for WebCT is Netscape Navigator 4.x. Microsoft Internet Explorer 4.x can be used as well, but with a few problems. Basically, WebCT provides an "empty course" or template for instructors to customize their courses by modifying the look and layout of the web pages and creating or uploading course content. Examples of built-in tools that they can use include the following: course calendar, auto-marked quizzes, student self-evaluation, group project organization, electronic mail, online chat, student homepages, student progress tracking, grade maintenance and distribution, access control, and navigation tools (WebCT, 1998). These tools can be accessed by clicking on the various buttons displayed at the bottom frame of the appropriate tool pages. To date, some of them have been used in the development of the Web Course in Business Chinese. It is anticipated that more tools will be used as the project proceeds. The following paragraphs present the various web pages created so far.

BANNER AND WELCOME MESSAGE

The first step in developing the web course is to create a banner that symbolizes the course. It can be in a GIF image and/or text. By clicking the Banner button within the Customize Page tool page, the instructor can choose to upload his/her own GIF file and/or type in a text message. Figure 1 illustrates the banner formatted for the Web Course in Business Chinese.

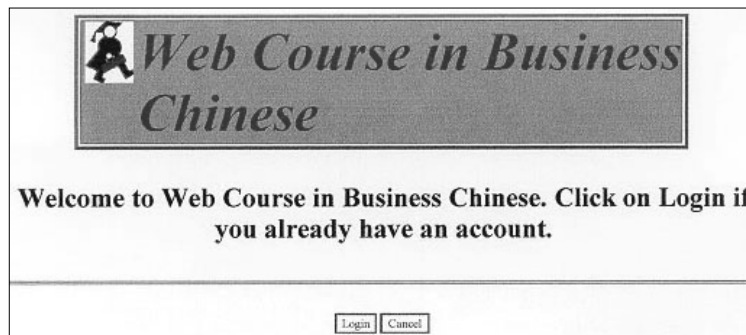


Figure 1. Banner and Welcome Message

Notice that there is a welcome message below the banner. This message is created by clicking on *Welcome Page* and then *Customize Page*. In typing in the welcome text heading, the instructor has the choices of center or left alignment, font size and style (bold, italic, or underlined), and color of the text. In Figure 1, the heading is created using center alignment and 5 point bold font. The color of the text is in navy blue. This welcome page is accessible to the public without a login ID and/or password. The purpose of this page is to notify the public about the availability of the web course. The instructor can optionally add a blurb in the heading to promote the course.

HOMEPAGE

From the welcome page, students with a login ID and password can then access the course homepage. The WebCT default homepage can be modified by the instructor to suit his/her course. The initial layout of the default homepage consists of the tools displayed in Figure 2.

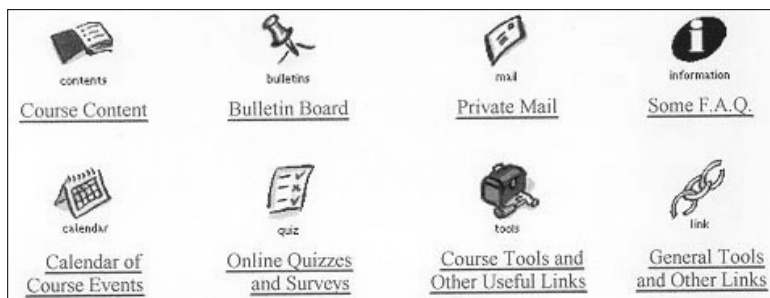


Figure 2. Default Homepage Tools

The tool icons link to either other web pages within WebCT or external web sites. On this page, the instructor can click on *Organize Icons* to edit, move, or delete the icons. The instructor can also add a header or footer to the homepage by clicking on *Customize Page* and then *Header* or *Footer*. Customizing the header and footer is similar to customizing the welcome message discussed previously. A counter can also be added to the homepage, which shows how many times the page has been accessed. The instructor can configure the digit style, the number of digits, the frame color and thickness, and the text before and after the counter by clicking on *Customize Page*, then *Counter*, and then *Configure*. Figure 3 shows a customized homepage for the Web Course in Business Chinese, which consists of a header, two additional tool icons (*Course Outline* and *Instructor's Homepage*), and a counter.

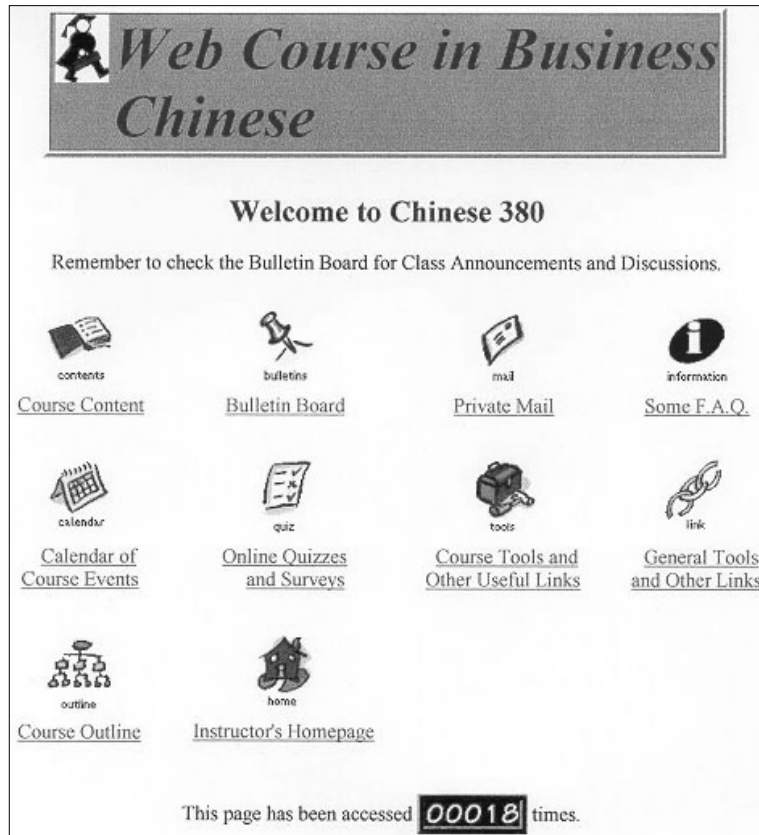


Figure 3. Customized Homepage

The default icons link to various pages within WebCT, while the two additional icons link to external web sites, with the former linking to a syllabus page created by the instructor and the latter to the instructor's homepage shown in Figures 4 and 5, respectively.

<p style="text-align: center;">CHINESE 380</p> <p style="text-align: center;">WEB COURSE IN BUSINESS CHINESE</p> <p style="text-align: center;"> Course Objective Prerequisite and Credit Textbook Recommended Cassettes Course Requirements Grading Criteria Schedule University Policies Advisement </p>
<p>Professor: Kylie Hsu, Ph.D.</p> <p>Office: King Hall A3030</p> <p>Office Hours: MW 11:30 - 1:30 or by appointment / e-mail</p> <p>Phone: (213) 343-4274</p> <p>Email: khsu2@calstatela.edu</p> <p>Home Page: http://www.calstatela.edu/faculty/khsu2/khsu2.htm</p>
<p>Course Objective</p> <p>The objective of this Web Course in Business Chinese is to benefit nontraditional students who cannot take time off their busy work schedule to come to campus to learn Business Chinese, which is an urgent need among many business professionals in order to maintain and expand their business opportunities. This computer-mediated course is user-friendly and provides an active learning environment. Its interactive tools allow students to get immediate feedback on how they are doing. The course is also designed for collaborative learning among students through the bulletin board and online "chatting" where they can post questions and discussions.</p>
<p>Prerequisite and Credit</p> <p>This is a four-unit course. The prerequisite for this course is CHIN-200C (Intermediate Mandarin) or the instructor's comment is the student has an equivalent background.</p>
<p>Textbook</p> <p><i>Practical Business Conversations</i>, National Taiwan Normal University, Mandarin Training Center, 1990</p>
<p>Recommended Cassettes</p> <p><i>Practical Business Conversations</i>, National Taiwan Normal University, Mandarin Training Center, 1990.</p>

Figure 4. Course Outline (Partial Page Shown)

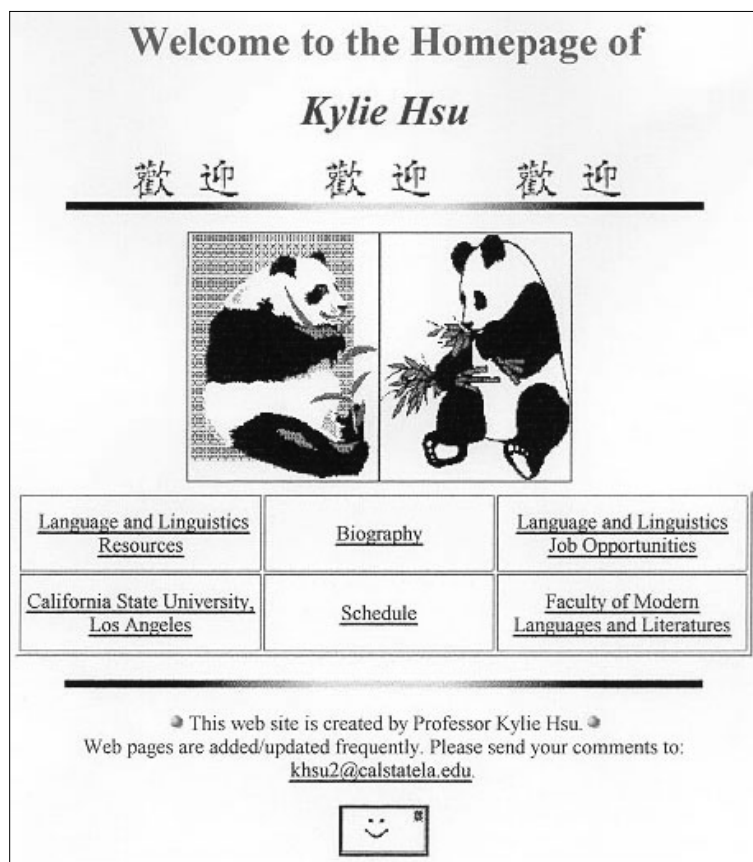


Figure 5. Instructor's Homepage

SELF-TEST QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

WebCT has a *Course Content* tool on the homepage (see icon in Figure 3) that allows the instructor to generate self-tests in the form of multiple-choice questions to help students reinforce what they have learned from the course. After clicking on this tool, the instructor can click on *Question* and *Answer* on the appropriate tool pages to access a text-entry window, where he/she can type in questions and answers. Generally, each question is followed by a few answers, only one of which is correct. To specify the correct answer for a particular question, the instructor

clicks on the radio button next to the correct answer, as shown in Figure 6.

<input checked="" type="radio"/>	Question 1	The English equivalent of the phrase 差額補償 is as follows:	
<input type="radio"/>	Answer 1	Compensation for the difference between two amounts	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	Answer 2	Retail and wholesale price difference	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	Answer 3	Repair of damaged goods	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	Question 2	中島先生買了一批鞋，為什麼立刻趕到台灣來理論？	
<input type="radio"/>	Answer 1	那批貨物沒有按時送到。	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	Answer 2	其中少數受到損害。	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	Answer 3	其中少數與樣品不符。	<input checked="" type="radio"/>

Figure 6. Multiple-Choice Questions and Answers

The display in this figure is available to the instructor only. WebCT automatically transforms it to a different format for students, which does not display the answer key. Students who want to test themselves on the questions click on a *self-test* icon/link on the appropriate content page to access the questions. They see the questions in the format illustrated in Figure 7.

1	<p>The English equivalent of the phrase 差額補償 is as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Compensation for the difference between two amounts ● Retail and wholesale price difference ● Repair of damaged goods
2	<p>中島先生買了一批鞋，為什麼立刻趕到台灣來理論？</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 那批貨物沒有按時送到。 ● 其中少數受到損害。 ● 其中少數與樣品不符。

Figure 7. Self-Test Questions

Notice that the answers to the questions are not marked. Students test themselves by clicking on the radio buttons next to the answers that they think are correct. For example, in the first question if a student thinks that the correct answer is “Repair of damaged goods,” then he/she would click on the radio button next to it. WebCT would then display a red cross sign at the bottom frame of the page to indicate that the answer is

wrong. The student can try again until he/she gets the correct answer, in which case a green check sign will be displayed to indicate that the answer is correct.

In Figures 6 and 7, the questions are based on Chapter 14 (“Compensation Demand”) of the assigned textbook *Practical Business Conversations* (NTNU, 1990) as specified in the course outline/syllabus seen previously in Figure 4.

STUDENT MANAGEMENT

Student data management is an important aspect of an instructor’s responsibilities. WebCT allows the instructor to conveniently manage the following student data: names, login IDs, assignments, quizzes/tests, exams, grades, and e-mail. Figure 8 displays a simple set of student data which is accessed by clicking on *Course Management* and then *Student Management*.




First Name Edit	Last Name Edit	Login ID	Midterm Exam Edit Graph Out of 100	Final Exam Edit Graph Out of 100	Total Score Edit Graph Out of 200	Course Grade Edit
 Student 1	No. 1	student1	90	95	185	A
 Student 2	No. 2	student2	80	85	165	B
 Student 3	No. 3	student3	70	75	145	C

Figure 8. Student Data

The columns can be rearranged and edited to suit the course. Additional columns of data (e.g., attendance, presentations, projects) can also be generated by clicking on *Edit Columns* and then *Add*. WebCT also has the capability of calculating the scores of quizzes, tests, and exams via the “Total Score” column, which is formatted as a formula field whose value is based on the values of other columns. The instructor can also view class statistics and score distribution by clicking on *Graph* in the “Total Score” column.

BULLETIN BOARD

Since the instructor and students of a web course have little or no face-to-face contact as in a traditional class, it is important for them to maintain communication via the Internet. WebCT has a *Bulletin Board* tool on the homepage (see icon in Figure 3) to accomplish this task. Both the instructor and students can access the *Bulletin Board* by clicking on its icon. They can then compose messages and post them for others to read and reply to in the same way they use an electronic mail system. In addition, they can compile selected messages, search messages by various properties (e.g., subject, date, and author), and the like. Figure 9 shows a welcome note from the instructor on the bulletin board.

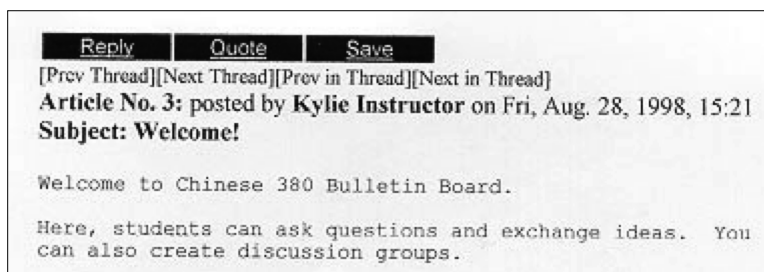


Figure 9. Bulletin Board Posting

IS THE WEB COURSE EFFECTIVE?

Since the Web Course in Business Chinese at CSULA is still under construction, its effectiveness compared to traditional instruction is not yet known. However, it is expected that the various user-friendly WebCT tools discussed above would contribute to its effectiveness. From a student's standpoint, the advantages of using WebCT for learning are obvious: convenience in terms of place and time, multimedia features (e.g., sound, graphics), online links to external resources, one-on-one interactive environment, and self-paced learning. In addition, students' answers to multiple-choice questions can be automatically corrected and scored by the computer, thus saving a considerable amount of time for the instructor.

The disadvantage is the absence of face-to-face interaction between the instructor and the student, which is considered to be important in language learning. Unlike the traditional classroom where students are closely monitored by the instructor during closed-book, timed tests, it is

impossible for WebCT to check on the students in this respect. It is also obvious that creating multiple-choice questions would take a lot of time and planning on the part of the instructor. The answer choices must be well designed and valid (ETS, 1996); otherwise, they do not actually test the student's understanding of the materials. Traditionally, translation and opinion questions, for example, are open-ended so that students can present the answers they think show their understanding of the meanings, concepts, and ideas. With WebCT there is still no mechanism for students to type in their subjective answers in an online and timed fashion. However, it is still possible for students to send in their answers separately via electronic mail.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This paper has provided a general picture of how WebCT tools are used to develop a Web Course in Business Chinese at California State University, Los Angeles. In general, the input format of WebCT is WYSIWYG ('what you see is what you get'), as with a word processor. Tools presented include those for designing a banner, homepage, and self-test questions, setting up student data, and communicating through a bulletin board. There are, of course, other tools that have not been covered such as file manager, glossary editor, index editor, reference editor, etc. The interactive tools of WebCT provide an active learning environment by allowing students to get immediate feedback. They are also designed for collaborative learning among students through posting questions and discussions. Finally, they enable the instructor to manage student data and check student progress.

Online courses have received both positive responses (e.g., Schutte, 1996) and negative reactions (e.g., Neal, 1998). Notwithstanding the controversy, it is hoped that the Web Course in Business Chinese represents a medium of distance education that will benefit nontraditional students who are highly motivated and can work independently without constant supervision by the instructor. Although it is possible for students to take the course without face-to-face interaction with the instructor, it is recommended that they meet with the instructor at a time convenient for both parties, preferably at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the term. With regard to web courses, Hazari (1998) believes that, "With sound pedagogical design, web-based instruction can create meaningful learning environments by engaging students in active application of

knowledge, concepts and giving them an opportunity to control pace and monitor learning which will help them grow and evolve as the course progresses.”

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